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Quote of the
 week



**"We will not
 allow violence to
 change our
 societies or our
 values. . . "**

**Prime Minister
 Tony Blair** in a
 statement on behalf
 of the Group of
 Eight leaders and
 the heads of five
 developing nations
 who were meeting
 in Gleneagles,
 Scotland, when four
 deadly explosions
 rocked London
 Thursday. A group
 calling itself "The
 Secret Organization
 of al-Qaida in
 Europe" claimed
 responsibility for
 the blasts, which
 killed at least 50
 people and
 wounded more than
 700.



Opinion

Allen shifts Iraq debate

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Rep. Tom Allen, D-Maine, is taking a bold step that shifts the debate about war in Iraq away from "stay" or "withdraw" to an issue that is the key to establishing democracy in that war-torn country.

He is introducing legislation that will affirm that the United States plans no long-term military presence in Iraq. It will reassure the Iraqi people, America's allies and skeptics at home and abroad that the United States will not seek permanent bases in Iraq.

"I have become convinced that a major factor fueling the growing insurgency in Iraq is the apprehension held by many Iraqis that the United States plans to maintain a long-term military presence in their country," Rep. Allen said in a press release Tuesday. The Iraq Sovereignty Promotion Act "would send a clear signal to the Iraqi people that we fully support their efforts to establish democracy and exercise sovereignty ... (and) that Iraqis will choose their own destinies," he says.

There are 14 U.S. "enduring bases" in Iraq capable of housing 110,000 U.S. troops. Under construction is a U.S. Embassy in Iraq that will be located on 104 acres and house 1,020 staff and 500 guards — the world's largest embassy, notes Erik Leaver in a recent commentary in the Seattle Post-Intelligencer.

What's more, "There has been little role for Iraqis in approving U.S. plans for adding new facilities," he says. This "directly violates the will" of the 82 percent of Sunnis and 69 percent of Shiites in a January Zogby poll, and "a clear majority" of Iraqi voters in Jan. 30 exit polls, who want the U.S. military occupation to end.

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Maine's Congressional Delegation

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Sen. Susan Collins:

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Rep. Mike Michaud:

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When You Write.

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3241.

Leaver is the policy outreach director for the Foreign Policy In Focus project (www.fpif.org) and a research fellow at the Institute for Policy Studies (www.ips-dc.org).

As does Rep. Allen, Leaver believes the common denominator for all insurgent groups is resentment about the U.S. military presence. "As the U.S. presence has escalated, so too has insurgent recruitment," he notes.

"A wiser policy would be ruling out any possibility that the United States will build permanent bases," Leaver says. "This would be a big step toward a fully sovereign and democratic Iraq."

Rep. Allen's legislation is right on the mark. It will offer a diplomatic tool that could be powerful if it is backed up with action. Or it will reveal that the Bush administration and the Pentagon really do plan a long-term U.S. military presence despite the will of the Iraqi people.

Tuesday night President Bush told the American people the U.S. presence must not be scaled back before Iraq is a stable country where democracy thrives. Fine; but we must make it clear to the Iraqis that they will decide when that time has arrived.

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